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Author(s): Brian Hanley

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The Irish Citizen Army after 1916

Brian Hanley

That the Irish Citizen Army (ICA) remained in existence for almost two decades after the 1916 Rising has been noted in several studies. However, little attention has been paid to its politics. It has been described as essentially 'passive' during the war of independence, but 'one hundred per cent republican' in its reaction to the Anglo-Irish Treaty.¹ Its re-emergence in 1934 has been treated solely as a result of the formation of the Republican Congress.² While the minor role of the ICA in the 1919-23 period cannot be gainsaid, there were a variety of reasons for this. The organisation was never clear on its political and military purposes and was hidebound both by a petty application of formal discipline and by the tendency of its members to use it as a social club. Its attitude to the national struggle and the Treaty was the subject of internal controversy and led to a split in 1922. A key factor in this split was the attitude within the ICA to the ITGWU leadership. The individuals who relaunched the ICA during the 1930s did so on their own initiative and the organisation was politically more vibrant in that period than it had been before 1922. After 1934 the politics of this grouping underwent major changes eventually leading to its immersion in mainstream labour politics. Indeed, the ICA provided the core of the group that pushed the Labour Party towards endorsing the 'workers' republic' as its objective in 1936.

The war of independence

Throughout the war of independence there were probably never more than 250 people involved in the ICA. The organisation was centred on Dublin, where at least 120 members assembled for a battalion convention in June 1919. A number of the ICA's Dublin units were organised in areas outside the city, such as Terenure, Baldoyle, and Lucan.³ At various stages the ICA also had members in Cork, Monaghan (where Peadar O'Donnell organised a unit in June 1919), Derry, Drogheda and Glasgow.⁴ Its leadership was composed of veterans of the 1913-16 period such as Frank Robbins, Michael Donnelly, Séamus McGowan, Dick McCormack, John Hanratty, Robert De Coeur and John Byrne. James O'Neill served as commandant, in effect chief of staff, from 1917 to 1921.⁵ The ICA also continued to include women and Countess Markievicz, despite her status as minister of labour in the first Dáil, served as a member of the army council and regularly attended (and chaired) its meetings during 1919-20. Madeleine ffrench Mullen became a member of the army council in early 1920, while Dr Kathleen Lynn was offered a position on the army council but declined it. Socialist Party of Ireland (SPI) member Margaret Skinnider assisted in drilling female ICA members during 1920.⁶ While all these women were 1916 veterans, the women and girls among the ICA rank and file included some who joined the organisation as new recruits during 1919. There was also a small youth section.⁷

To what extent did the ICA operate militarily during the war of independence? Members were drilled on a weekly basis in rooms given over to the ICA at Liberty Hall. There was irregular training in the use of small arms and various efforts made to organise instruction classes and camps. The army council's bi-weekly meetings took place under armed guard from February 1919 onwards. The organisation issued instructions to its members on when and when not to offer armed resistance to police and British army raids in March 1919.⁸ Members in the printing trade helped publish and distribute IRA propaganda. The organisation also carried out 'detective work' on behalf of the IRA. Likewise, Citizen Army women carried out medical support work for the republican forces. Members stole and bought weapons from British soldiers and carried and hid arms for the IRA.⁹ Séamus McGowan as director of munitions claimed to have secured about forty rifles through contacts with the British army in 1918.¹⁰ On one occasion ICA members stewarding a proscribed Connolly commemoration fired on police, wounding four of them.¹¹ Aside from that incident there is little evidence of ICA armed activity on its own initiative and the organisation usually functioned in a

support capacity for the IRA. This undoubtedly produced some frustration and members left to join the larger and more active organisation on several occasions. Some attempted to retain dual membership, until this was proscribed by the ICA in July 1919.¹² Even more likely to frustrate ICA members in the increasingly bitter struggle between the IRA and the crown forces were orders to avoid making 'enemies of the garrison'. Instead, members were ordered to appeal to rank and file soldiers on a class basis and 'bring them round to the people's side'.¹³ Whatever usefulness this policy may once have had (and the ICA did recruit at least some ex-soldiers to its ranks) it was unlikely to win many converts during the war of independence.¹⁴ On several occasions during early 1919 ICA members were reprimanded for starting fights with soldiers at public meetings and rallies. Frustration at lack of activity was also expressed through the unauthorised holding up of British soldiers, and demands for armed assistance to locals in Dorset Street who were being terrorised by a 'gang of rowdies'. Members also had to be disciplined for unauthorised raiding for arms.¹⁵ On another occasion an ICA man drew his gun during scuffles at an ITGWU-sponsored debate between supporters of P.T. Daly and William O'Brien at the Mansion House. While he claimed to have acted in 'self defence' this type of incident did little to improve the tense relationship between the ICA and Liberty Hall.¹⁶ It also reflected the continuing belief of many ICA members that they owed their allegiance to James Larkin and not the ITGWU leadership. Robert De Couer claimed to have been treated disrespectfully by O'Brien and Thomas Foran during a meeting to secure the hall for a concert.¹⁷ In April 1919 the ITGWU was demanding that the ICA cease using its rooms for military training, which the ICA attempted to circumvent by ordering its members to drill 'quietly'. However by 1920 the organisation was forced by military raids to discontinue using Liberty Hall, and made use of the Trades Hall in Capel Street.¹⁸

Political and social views

Several accounts assign blame for this inactivity to the leadership of James O'Neill.¹⁹ Yet factors other than his alleged passivity were important. The organisation had no clearly defined ideology, containing members sympathetic to republicanism, Larkinism, mainstream labour, and communism. Crucially, the relationship between the ICA and the republican movement was never adequately explained. The closest the ICA came to outlining the difference between itself and the IRA was a statement in 1920 that it existed primarily to give armed backing to organised labour. In theory only trade unionists were allowed into membership. However, the organisation realised that labour might wish to disassociate itself from actions the ICA might take on its behalf.²⁰ Yet a reading of the army council's minutes for 1919-20 mention no incidence of armed backing being given to labour, aside from the stewarding of the Connolly commemoration in June 1919. On that occasion, having been invited by the SPI to steward the event, the ICA had decided that if the commemoration were banned, they would hold their own meeting, using force if necessary.²¹ However, the organisation refused a request to allow the ICA pipe band to march in support of SPI candidate Walter Carpenter in December 1919, preferring to support republican candidates.²² A discussion of what might occur if the Limerick general strike of April 1919 spread produced no conclusion or suggestion of aid.²³ Appeals for the ICA to join in efforts to have Jim Larkin released were rejected on the basis that Delia Larkin had used the ICA's name without permission and that the ICA as a 'physical movement' had its own plans to free Larkin if 'passive' activity failed. Markievicz also assured the membership that the republican movement in the US was already doing 'their best' for Larkin.²⁴ Her position as a Dáil minister, while also an ICA member, seems to have gone unquestioned. She acted instead as a conduit between the ICA and the IRA, passing on notice of Sinn Féin rallies and gaining permission for ICA members to intervene in the case of the Dorset St 'rowdies'.²⁵ However, some frustration was expressed at her perceived unwillingness to organise the ICA outside Dublin and in one case she had to be 'ordered' to start a unit.²⁶

Eventually the lack of policy caused dissension. In January 1920 Michael Donnelly argued that the ICA had ceased to fight for a workers' republic and had become a 'tail' of Sinn Féin. He criticised the

fact that there were some ICA members in Sinn Féin clubs and that the organisation seemed to have no independent policy. He argued that it was 'illogical' to back the IRA, as they were not fighting for the same type of republic as the ICA. Dick McCormack accused him of wanting to 'break up' the ICA.²⁷ McCormack was in turn charged by Donnelly of using armed force to intimidate a lorry man outside Liberty Hall. Frank Robbins also accused McCormack of being among those who threatened a shop steward at gunpoint in Capel Street. Both these incidents occurred during strikes, the circumstances of which are unclear. While the army council agreed that McCormack was at fault in the first case at least, his long record of service was taken into account and he was not punished.²⁸ It is clear, however, that some personal enmity existed between McCormack and both Robbins and Donnelly, as well as political differences.

In the absence of any clearly defined role, the ICA developed an obsession with the protection of its separate status and its reputation. It refused to sell Sean O'Casey's *Story of the Irish Citizen Army* on the basis that it was 'inaccurate in many points'.²⁹ In late 1920 McGowan was disciplined for allowing his ICA title to be used at a Larkin support meeting. He countered by asking why Markievicz had never been disciplined for speaking at numerous Sinn Féin rallies.³⁰ When a former member, Seán McLaughlin, presented a report to the Third International on working-class organisations in Ireland which contained criticisms of the ICA, the organisation issued a 'warrant' for his arrest. After several weeks McLaughlin was tracked down but refused to appear before the army council in Liberty Hall. He was eventually questioned but escaped punishment and applied to rejoin the ICA some time later.³¹

It is clear that the social aspects of the ICA were a major attraction to its membership. Twice weekly, members gathered to play cards in the ICA rooms, with north and south Dublin members meeting on alternate nights. There was also an ICA football team and the ICA Pipe Band to compete for members' time.³² The organisation admitted during 1920 that the card rooms and band practice were 'mitigating against drilling'.³³ There were also long running leadership discussions about the supply of tunics and the addition of a red plume to the army's slouch hat. A great deal of time was also expended on organising social events and raffles.³⁴ Yet these social activities too pointed to contradictions in the ICA's egalitarianism. The card rooms were used by men only, while ICA women and girls gathered in the passages outside. The ICA's Irish language classes were also segregated.³⁵ Lily Shanahan found herself charged with impertinence when she told an officer that the 'girls were not wanted only when there was dirty work to be done'. On being questioned she argued that it was always women who had to sell flags and raffle tickets, as well as distribute pamphlets. The ICA leadership also complained of the 'girls' 'carrying on disorderly' in the halls.³⁶ Male members were warned on using 'bad language' while 'girls were listening' and the Connolly birthday dance was forbidden to feature any of that 'stuff termed Jazz'. More seriously, ICA officer Joe Doyle had to discipline his men for 'interfering' with some Jews after a rally in February 1919 and order them not to do so in future.³⁷

Despite the prestige and status gained by its involvement in the 1916 Rising the ICA played no real role in working-class struggles during the 1919-21 period and only an auxiliary one in the war of independence. What options were open to it militarily given the numerical dominance of the IRA is of course debatable. But given the explosion of working-class militancy throughout the period, its inactivity in that field was its major weakness. The differences among the ICA leadership largely account for this, as well as the absence of a clear political purpose.

The Treaty

The attitude of the ICA towards the Treaty also needs reappraisal. The organisation did not unanimously reject the Treaty. A majority, initially at least, seem to have adopted the same attitude as the leadership of the ITGWU, that of a cautious neutrality. From late 1921 there was increasing frustration at the tactics of both factions of the IRA expressed in the *Watchword of Labour*. There were reports of republican police arresting strikers, and IRA units backing farmers in disputes with labourers, and unease that both factions seemed to be a 'law unto themselves'.³⁸ One ICA officer

complained of the 'wild' behaviour of the 'Free State and Republican mobs' in Terenure, who had molested civilians on numerous occasions. He wished that the ICA could provide some protection against them and claimed his men would not hesitate to shoot 'both parties'.³⁹ It is possibly this type of frustration, rather than simply the machinations of William O'Brien and Cathal O'Shannon, which saw the ICA willing to become part of a nationwide 'Irish Workers Army' in the spring of 1922, neutral of both pro and anti-Treatyite forces. O'Shannon had signalled that such an independent force was desirable as early as July 1920.⁴⁰ Meetings took place between the ICA and senior ITGWU figures, which agreed on a nationwide recruitment drive to establish the new army. O'Brien reported 'very encouraging' responses from ITGWU branches to the suggestion of the new force in March 1922.⁴¹ Two months later Michael Donnelly and John Byrne claimed that there was 'growing demand' among trade union members for the force. After the formation of a number of units outside Dublin, a convention had been held, which appointed an executive committee to oversee the development of the Workers' Army.⁴² The aims of the new army were to defend Ireland against 'foreign aggression', protect workers during strikes, secure the rights of workers as 'citizens', and fight for the ultimate aim of a workers' republic. The ICA would provide its core. The desire to resist 'foreign aggression' reflected genuine nationalist feeling within the ICA ranks. The Terenure officer who had complained about the rival republican 'mobs' also argued that ammunition be stocked up by the ICA, so as to 'shoot the English later'.⁴³ But there were dissenting voices. In June a number of ICA officers, including McCormack, de Couer and John Hanratty, attacked the Workers' Army idea as a plot by the ITGWU leadership to claim its 'place in the sun of the British Empire'. Claiming to owe allegiance to Larkin as ICA 'commander-in-chief', the officers berated the 'Judases' who had stood aloof from the ICA during the recent conflict but now sought to use them. They particularly singled out the fact that the ICA had provided stewards for Labour's rally during the general strike against militarism in April, which they claimed was organised to give 'sanction to the Free State'.⁴⁴ Séamus McGowan, too, had been expelled from the ICA in late 1921 and orders issued to forcibly remove him if he turned up for parades.⁴⁵ This was linked to efforts to prevent members of the Communist Party of Ireland (CPI), which McGowan was to join, from infiltrating the ICA. British communists had urged the CPI to engage with the ICA in order to purge it of its 'bourgeois' tendencies.⁴⁶ Though CPI leader Roddy Connolly had served in the ICA as aide de camp to his father in Easter Week, he was unable to persuade the army to associate in any way with the communists. The CPI subsequently formed its own 'red guard'.⁴⁷

The civil war

While the communists attributed their exclusion to the influence of the 'sleek headed intellectual' O'Shannon, it was the case that senior and long serving ICA men such as Robbins, Donnelly, O'Kelly, and Byrne were backing the ITGWU leadership's line.⁴⁸ Their section of the ICA provided the armed stewards for the anti-militarist rally. While the irony of armed men belonging to a self-proclaimed army protesting against militarism has been noted, their position was not inexplicable. The Robbins-Donnelly faction argued that they were obviously not opposed to armed force per se, but to 'brigandage and the idea of an army not being responsible to civil authority'. They refuted the claim that they stood 'for Empire', arguing that the section of the ICA opposing the Workers' Army was dragooning the workers into association with the 'murderers of Connolly' by weakening the Labour Party effort at the general election. They claimed that the ITGWU leadership had supported the ICA 'in every manner possible', while critics had refused actively to organise it among the workers.⁴⁹ That the anti-Treatyites were somehow the natural allies of labour was not clear at all in early 1922. The Workers' Army faction claimed that while some of their critics were in contact with the anti-Treatyite forces in the Four Courts, the 'irregular' IRA had locked up the leading ICA officer in Roscrea.⁵⁰ Other factors such as the fear that Labour candidates would not be able to campaign without armed guard and that the provisional government might become a military dictatorship probably also weighed on their minds. Hence, organised labour would need an armed force to protect it from the 'Green and

Tannery' of *both* sides.⁵¹ Nor was it the case that the Labour Party was irrelevant in an election dominated by the Treaty: it secured more votes than the anti-Treatyites in Dublin and had seventeen TDs elected. There was a sizable working-class constituency unimpressed by either republican faction.⁵² While O'Brien and O'Shannon may have had no intention of ever utilising the Workers' Army as an effective force, it is unfair to assume that its ICA supporters did not act honestly. After all Donnelly had been critical for some time of the ICA's failure to differentiate itself from the republican movement.

Nevertheless, a significant section of the ICA took the anti-Treaty side in the civil war, including some of those (such as the Terenure unit) who had been uneasy about supporting the republicans earlier in the year. Despite the ICA's initial contact with the Four Courts garrison it was not until the autumn of 1922 that the anti-Treaty IRA officially gave orders to its officers to 'co-operate in a definite way' with them. The IRA's Dublin adjutant met Dick McCormack and asked him to supply lists of men working in on the railways, on ships and in the printing trade. The IRA estimated the ICA's membership at about 200 in the Dublin area, with access to approximately 100 handguns. The ICA women were to operate with Cumann na mBan. The IRA also hoped to make use of Roddy Connolly's 'Red army'.⁵³ That the IRA had no intention of making the ICA equal partners is evident from the tone of its communications. The IRA felt it essential that workers be prevented, physically if necessary, from aiding the Free State and facilitating the movement of National Army troops. Thus the IRA 'could use' the working-class connections of the ICA and Connolly's 'bunch' for intelligence and sabotage.⁵⁴ The extent of ICA action in the civil war is difficult to quantify. By August ten of its members were in jail. During the summer it took part in blocking roads and mounting armed patrols in Rathfarnham and Tallaght, and clashed with Free State troops at Glenasmole. It also assisted the IRA in the provision of safe houses, collecting arms and equipment, and planning a breakout from Mountjoy prison in early 1923.⁵⁵ Given that the ICA was largely a Dublin-based organisation and that anti-Treaty activity in the city was very limited after August 1922, it is not surprising that it was able to do little.

Reorganisation

The years after the civil war saw sporadic attempts to organise left-wing armed groups. McGowan became active in the James Connolly Workers' Club during the late 1920s. At a meeting of the club in 1929 Roddy Connolly suggested the formation of a Workers' Defence Corps or a 'new ICA'.⁵⁶ When the Irish Labour Defence League was founded in July that year a number of members again discussed a likely armed component, with Helena Molony urging the reformation of the ICA.⁵⁷ However, the involvement of large numbers of IRA members in the league meant that they would dominate any new body. Connolly had expressed the view that the IRA should not be allowed have the 'monopoly' on armed force, but the difficulty was of course that by 1930 the IRA was increasingly taking action itself in labour disputes, and had the numbers and arms to make the efforts of others seem pointless.⁵⁸ It was not until increasing political divisions split the IRA, and within a very changed political atmosphere, that the ICA re-emerged.

The fact that 1933 had seen the most serious violence directed against the left since the civil war possibly influenced the decision to relaunch the ICA. In April mobs had sacked the CPI's Connolly House and attacked the Workers' College. Left-wing meetings were menaced increasingly by anti-communist gangs and by the autumn the blueshirts had become a major force. McGowan, McCormack, and Frank Purcell were at the heart of the ICA's re-organisation in early 1934. Their small grouping had continued to maintain a skeleton organisation in the hope that one day the most 'militant members' of the working class would realise the need for such a body.⁵⁹ During 1934 the organisation once more emerged publicly, marching in the Wolfe Tone commemoration at Bodinstown and entering into negotiations with those left-wingers who had abandoned the IRA. The IRA, which saw it as linked to the split in its ranks, viewed the re-emergence of the ICA with suspicion. When the ICA applied to take part in the Bodinstown commemoration, Donal O'Donoghue

replied that there was no indication that the ICA had been in 'active existence' until the formation of an organisation 'hostile to the IRA'.⁶⁰

However, the ICA's revival was not a product of Republican Congress manipulation, although undoubtedly the appearance of a potentially vibrant left-republican organisation influenced the ICA's thinking. The members themselves claimed that they saw in the formation of the Congress the possibility that the 'best and most progressive elements' in the republican and labour movements could be mobilised. It was certainly not the case that the Congress 'dug up' a few ICA veterans to give 'colour' to their enterprise.⁶¹ For the Congress the ICA provided an opportunity to reassure members who were taunted by their former comrades in the IRA that they had 'deserted the physical force movement'. Indeed, it seems many Congress activists 'demanded' some form of military organisation.⁶²

Roddy Connolly helped Mick Price and George Gilmore meet the eight members of the ICA army council. According to Price, the ICA decided to re-organise and recruit openly, regardless of what the 'armed groups' affiliated to the Republican Congress intended doing. The ICA had members scattered across four trade unions in Dublin, but they planned to extend their membership as widely as possible, while also seeking official trade union support. They saw themselves at this point as 'primarily...an Anti-Fascist Force'. In their appeal for support from trade unions they intended to use Labour leader William Norton's statement that the 'Fascists will only come to power in Ireland over the dead bodies of workers'. Nevertheless, the ICA made it clear that their 'limited forces' would remain independent of all political parties, including the Congress, although that could change if the Congress created a 'real revolutionary party'. However, they agreed to co-opt four representatives of the Congress onto their army council.⁶³ The Congress would later claim that there were only twenty ICA members in Dublin before it facilitated the addition of 'hundreds' of ex-IRA members.⁶⁴ Whatever about the numbers involved there was little scope for ICA armed activity prior to the September 1934 Rathmines meeting, to which all units were ordered to send two delegates. Among those who attended were McGowan, Purcell, Joe Doyle, Liam Kelly and Seamus O'Brien.⁶⁵



Michael Price

Political re-evaluation

At Rathmines the ICA veterans backed the Price/Connolly proposal to form an openly socialist political party. Although the proposal was defeated there was not an immediate rupture and relations with the Republican Congress remained confused for a period. Roddy Connolly, for example, continued as a Congress member well into 1935, despite the defeat of his proposal. Price and Nora Connolly O'Brien on the other hand left the Congress and were soon involved with the ICA. By November the ICA was announcing that the 'merger' between itself and the Congress was at an end. There followed a bout of mutual recrimination and vitriol, during which both sides claimed to represent the majority of ICA members. For a period Roddy Connolly continued as chief of staff of one faction and urged his supporters to ignore the 'hysterical' ICA *Bulletin*, which he suggested was fit only for exhibition in a revolutionary museum in a future workers' republic.⁶⁶ He in turn was

accused of betraying the 'old Bolsheviks' he had praised at Rathmines and colluding with the ex-IRA element's 'despicable efforts' to destroy the ICA. Congress supporters also mocked the ICA veterans by accusing them of having chosen the 'dodgers-dug out' while they had been active in the IRA during the 1920s.⁶⁷ Eventually both factions would be content to ignore each other but Price continued to maintain that the Congress 'had a lot to answer for' in its failure to capitalise on the opportunities of 1934. The Price-led ICA claimed about 300 members in early 1935, which would suggest that a substantial number of IRA veterans remained with this faction. The organisation's largest unit was in Dublin where the Connolly Mallin Hall in Parnell Square was used for meetings, drilling and social events. There were also units in Belfast, Cork, Limerick and Kilkenny.⁶⁸

Politically the ICA maintained that a 'triple alliance' was necessary for the attainment of a workers' republic: an industrial union, a socialist party, and a workers' army.⁶⁹ It never renounced arms, believing that in the last instance the overthrow of capitalism would require force. However, the IRA was criticised for elitism and putschism.⁷⁰ For the ICA violence would only come at the final stage of a popular revolution after the 'widest support' had been won through 'social and political activity'.⁷¹ The *ICA Bulletin* reminded its readers that 'skill with a rifle was not more important than your patience on a picket line, nor are either of these more salient than your electoral activity'.⁷² The Dublin tramway strike of March 1935 did produce a threat that the guns of the ICA would not 'remain silent' if troops were used against strikers, but this rhetoric was increasingly rare in ICA propaganda.⁷³

Allied to this was a marked downplaying of nationalist rhetoric. The ICA claimed that while 'break the connection with England' had been a good slogan, 'break the connection with capitalism' was a better one because it included that 'lesser evil' with the greater.⁷⁴ In 1935 the ICA refused to support either the IRA Easter or Bodinstown commemorations, arguing that it had 'subordinated itself' for too long to the idea of 'all together against the British' and had neglected the struggle against economic injustice. Republican slogans such as 'England is our only enemy' were now judged to be both misleading and inadequate, as were campaigns to boycott British produce while scab goods were left unhindered.⁷⁵ A key part of ICA strategy was the encouragement of militant industrial unionism. The ICA supported the idea of 'One Big Union' and expressed hostility to the 'multiplicity' of small, breakaway unions.⁷⁶ It felt that the Republican Congress had neglected the trade union struggle and failed to base itself sufficiently on the organised working class.⁷⁷ During the tramway dispute the ICA called for a general strike in response to government intervention.⁷⁸ The ICA also stressed the need to link the struggles of the unemployed and rural labour with industrial workers.⁷⁹ A great deal of the ICA's thinking on trade unionism was dominated by the view that the unions were facing an imminent fascist assault, not from the blueshirts but from Fianna Fáil's 'practical Fascism'. The systems of 'arbitration and conciliation' were seen as the 'first phase of the Corporate State' and Lemass was denounced for emulating Hitler by introducing the 1935 Conditions of Employment Act.⁸⁰

The Labour Party

The ICA said little on international affairs, except to condemn the Italian invasion of Abyssinia.⁸¹ While units were urged to have 'harmonious' relations with the IRA if possible, membership of the CPI was 'irreconcilable' with that of the ICA.⁸² Ironically given the ICA's gradual disavowal of nationalism one of the reasons for this was because the CPI was not an 'Irish' organisation, but a party whose 'base of control' lay in London and Moscow, from where it was 'rigidly' directed. The fact that the CPI had strongly opposed Price and Connolly at Rathmines and claimed that the ICA was making 'a mockery' of the memory of the 1916 Citizen Army also no doubt contributed to this hostility.⁸³ There is no indication of how many women were members of the ICA, but Nora Connolly O'Brien did serve on the army council.⁸⁴ Members were not forbidden from joining the National Army reserve forces or from claiming military service pensions. If brought before the courts they were urged to recognise them so as not to be 'easy prey' for the authorities.⁸⁵ In a short period of time the organisation moved quite a distance from traditional republican practice.

With the failure of the Republican Congress to provide the basis of a socialist political organisation the ICA was forced to look elsewhere. During the tramway dispute it had called on Labour Party TDs to 'wake up' and use the Dáil to highlight the workers' fight.⁸⁶ In June 1935 the ICA convention voted to instruct its membership to join both the Irish and Northern Ireland Labour Parties. One factor behind this decision was the belief that workers faced an 'imminent' threat of fascism 'in the guise of green'. Another was the belief that while workers were widely disillusioned with Fianna Fáil, the only organisations with the potential to 'detach' workers from Fianna Fáil and the IRA, and win cross-community support in the north were the Labour parties. Within them, the ICA's 'young, enthusiastic and class conscious' revolutionaries could have a major impact.⁸⁷ Members were ordered to join their local Labour branches and demand regular meetings and the distribution of publications and propaganda.⁸⁸ Where the local party was resistant, as in Kilkenny, it was suggested that ICA members should write to Labour head office and inform them that a number of young workers were eager to get involved with the party but found the local branch apathetic.⁸⁹

Once inside the party the ICA role was to argue that it would be impossible for Labour to become a major force unless it declared definitively as its 'ultimate aim and object - the Workers' Republic' and took an active role in the struggles of the urban and rural workers and the unemployed. Among the demands to be raised by ICA members were a five-day, forty-hour working week, equal pay for women, a minimum wage, free school books, state housing and the division of 'ranches'. It was emphasised that this activity was to be geared towards building a revolutionary movement, not just, as the Kilkenny ICA were informed, for the 'mere purpose' of re-electing local TD James Pattison.⁹⁰ Activity in the Labour Party was the main

ARM LUÓTA OIBRE NA h-ÉIREANN.
(THE IRISH CITIZEN ARMY)

GENERAL HEADQUARTERS.
DUBLIN.

REF. A.C.B. 19
Price: One Penny

1935
April 26th 5

ARMY COUNCIL BULLETIN.

WELL DONE TRAMWAYMEN! NO SURRENDER
WHAT WE HAVE WE HOLD.

Once again the Bus and Tram strikers have refused to be the first body of Irish workers to surrender the right to strike. By their decision they have proved that they understand the menace to Trades Unionism in the Tramway Company's refusal to negotiate without resumption of work; and in spite of Lemass' threat of legislation against the right to strike they have declared that they will not relinquish the only sure method which the workers have to force consideration of their claims - the withdrawal of labour.

All possible pressure has been put upon the workers to compel them to abandon their only surety that their demands will be considered; every attempt has been made by the Government and the Press to put the attitude of the strikers before the public in an unfair light. "No negotiations and no consideration of demands until the workers return to work" declared the autocratic Tramway Co. "Quite right" replied Lemass. "I'll do nothing to help end this strike unless the strikers accept the Tramway Company's condition."

Lemass' attitude on behalf of the Government is one of the most open and blatant declarations ever made by a Government Minister that he supports the employer as against "persons employed". No attempt has been made by him to compel the Tramway Co. to negotiate. One whisper that the Government considered the Tramway Co.'s refusal to negotiate a breach of contract, and that by its unreasonable attitude extending over such a long period it had voided its franchise; and that if it was determined to maintain its unjustifiable position they were prepared to set in train the municipalisation of the Dublin Transport system, would cause the Tramway Co. to consider quickly how they could most gracefully retract its decision not to negotiate. Negotiations would take place almost immediately and the end of the strike would be in view.

But Lemass is not big enough to think of thus ending the strike. The Tramway Co. dictates to Lemass, Lemass takes dictation from the Tramway Co., but, the strikers refuse to take dictation second-hand from Lemass.

The workers' right to enforce consideration of their claims for better wages and conditions through the withdrawal of labour, and to remain on strike until their demands had been considered, has been won by the sacrifice of workers. It has been won through courage and endurance, courage to endure starvation, misery, living death, prison, even death itself. All these have been necessary to win the right to strike. Years of stubborn struggle and suffering were necessary to win recognition of that right and to maintain it. The Dublin Tramway workers are worthy inheritors of that struggle. They know that the winning of that right has cost the workers in the past, and have declared by their ballot that they will not be the first to throw away the fruits of that long uphill struggle.

They have rights who dare maintain them. The strikers have shown

ICA Bulletin, 26 April 1935.

focus of the ICA from the summer of 1935. Activists were continually urged to push for the workers' republic slogan to be a major issue at the party's conference. Labour's attitude to the new recruits is hard to judge. Certainly some knew in advance that the ICA was intending to join their party and there seems to have been no effort to keep them out. The Kilkenny ICA did echo the perennial complaint of the left-wing labour activist that the local TD ignored them until 'posters need to be put up'.⁹¹ The ICA membership certainly played a role in the adoption by Labour of the workers' republic as its objective in February 1936. Both Price and Frank Purcell were delegates to the party conference and Price was elected to the administrative council.⁹² A year later he became secretary of the Dublin constituencies' council. Séamus McGowan would become a delegate to conference a year later. They were also joined by their adversary from the Republican Congress, Roddy Connolly, who himself was elected to the administrative council in 1937.⁹³

That Price oversaw this process was remarkable. From 1925 he had been one the IRA officers most associated with military rather than political action. He served as both director of intelligence and of training within the IRA, and was not identified with radical politics until 1934.⁹⁴ In the space of a year he seems to have become rapidly disillusioned with militarism. Possibly because of the ex-ICA element's involvement, the Dublin Labour Party held protests against the British coronation in 1937 and *Labour News* consistently campaigned for the rights of 'Old IRA' veterans, the paper adopting a marked nationalist tone.⁹⁵ By that period the ICA's public appearances were confined to commemorations or campaigns through its Old Comrades' Association for pension rights for ex-members.⁹⁶

Conclusion

While the involvement of McGowan and others assured continuity with the earlier organisation, the post-1934 ICA was more politically vibrant and active than its predecessor. It clearly attracted a number of young activists from the Republican Congress and went further than the Congress in its critique of republicanism. While it overestimated the extent of working-class disillusionment with Fianna Fáil, it was prepared to take a bold step in attempting to force the Labour Party leftwards. Indeed, it did achieve a measure of temporary success and its ultimate failure had more to do with the prevailing political climate in 1930s Ireland and the Labour Party itself, than the ICA.⁹⁷ Its existence, and the appearance of similar if short lived groupings, over a twenty year period illustrates too the continuing attraction of militarism in the post revolutionary period for those on the left republican and labour fringe.⁹⁸

Notes

1. Frank Robbins, *Under the Starry Plough: Recollections of the Irish Citizen Army* (Dublin, 1977); Arthur Mitchell, *Labour in Irish Politics, 1890-1930: The Irish Labour Movement in an Age of Revolution* (Dublin, 1974), p.79; R.M. Fox, *History of the Irish Citizen Army* (Dublin, 1944), p.217.
2. Fearghal McGarry, *Frank Ryan* (Dundalk, 2002), p.35; and Patrick Byrne, *The Irish Republican Congress Revisited* (London, 1994), p.15-16.
3. Irish Labour History Museum and Archives (ILHMA), ICA council minute book (ICAMB), 5, 19 February, 30 June 1919.
4. Ibid, 12 March, 18 June 1919 and 25 January 1920.
5. Ibid, Army Council list, 8 September 1920.
6. Ibid, 26 March, 28 May, 1 June 1919 and 3 February 1920. Lynn provided free medical treatment for ICA members.
7. Ibid, 2 April 1919. In February 1920 eleven boys and eleven girls were listed as ICA members.
8. Ibid, 3 February, 5 March, 26 March 1919.
9. UCD Archives (UCDA), Cowan Family Papers, ICA South County Dublin Unit, Memorandum of Active and General Service (Tan War), P34/D/45.
10. *Labour News*, 7 August 1937. McGowan, like a number of other ICA members such as George Fullerton, was from a Dublin Protestant background.
11. ILHMA, ICAMB, 11 May 1919; *Voice of Labour*, 14 June 1919. See also Robbins, *Under the Starry Plough*, p.208-9.
12. ILHMA, ICAMB, 15 September 1919, 19 August 1920 and 28 July 1919.
13. Ibid, 26 February and 9 March 1919.
14. Ibid, 26 February 1919.

15. Ibid, 12 March, 10, 20 November 1919 and 8 July 1920.
16. Ibid, 28 July 1919.
17. Ibid, 28 May 1920.
18. Ibid, 7, 14 April 1919.
19. Robbins, *Under the Starry Plough*, p.202; Mitchell, *Labour*, p.79.
20. ILHMA, ICAMB, 8 September 1920.
21. Ibid, 11 May and 2 June 1919. The organisation did attend the 1919 Labour Day march as 'a body' and stewarded the Russian Republic reception in Dublin's Mansion House a year earlier (ICAMB, 23 April 1919 and *Irish Opinion*, 9 February 1918).
22. ILHMA, ICAMB, 22 December 1919.
23. Ibid, 16, 23 April 1919.
24. Ibid, 26 May 1919, 13 May 1920, 13 June 1920.
25. Ibid, 26 March 1919 and 22 July 1920.
26. Ibid, 1 June, 20 October 1919.
27. Ibid, 25 January 1920.
28. Ibid, 2, 9 September 1920. The shop steward in the first case stated that he would leave work only on instruction from his union, not from armed men.
29. Ibid, 23 April 1919.
30. Ibid, 12 August, 4 September 1920.
31. Ibid, 20, 25 May, 22 July, 4 September 1920. See also W.K. Anderson, *James Connolly and the Irish Left* (Dublin, 1994), p.142.
32. ILHMA, ICAMB, 7 April 1919.
33. Ibid, 11 May 1919.
34. Ibid, 10 February, 31 March, 19 May, 1919 and 1 June 1920. Prizes included framed pictures of Connolly and Michael Mallin and Tara brooches.
35. Ibid, 9 March, 7 April 1919.
36. Ibid, 5 February, 9 March 1919.
37. Ibid, 5 February 1919, 11 April 1920, 26 February 1919.
38. See, for example, reports in the *Watchword of Labour*, 26 November, 10 December 1921, 21 January, 15 April 1922.
39. SIPTU Research Department files (SIPTU), Padg. O'Broin, O/C Terenure ICA to Major O'Kelly, 21 April 1922. (Courtesy of Manus O'Riordan).
40. In response to sectarian violence in Derry, O'Shannon argued that workers needed a 'defensive-offensive' force (*Watchword of Labour*, 17 July 1920).
41. National Library of Ireland (NLI), William O'Brien Papers, O'Brien, 2 March 1922, Ms.15,673(1).
42. Ibid, Donnelly and Byrne to ITGWU Executive, 2 May 1922, Ms.15,673(1).
43. Ibid, 'An Irish Workers' Army', March 1922, Ms. 15,673(1); SIPTU, Padg. O'Broin, O/C Terenure ICA to Major O'Kelly, 21 April 1922.
44. NLI, O'Brien Papers, ICA statement signed by Hanratty, De Couer and McCormack, 1 June 1922, Ms.15,673(1).
45. SIPTU, J. Byrne, A/G ICA to Major Kelly, 3 December 1921.
46. *Workers' Republic*, 19 November 1921.
47. Ibid, 11, 18 March 1922.
48. Ibid, 18 March 1922.
49. SIPTU, ICA statement signed by O'Kelly, Robbins, Donnelly and Byrne, 13 June 1922.
50. Ibid, ICA statement.
51. *Watchword of Labour*, 13 May, 24 June 1922.
52. Michael Gallagher, *Irish Elections: Results and Analysis* (Limerick, 1993), p.14-15.
53. UCDA, Sighe Humphreys Papers, Adj Dublin Brigade to Ass. C/S, IRA, 26 July 1922, P106/1954 (8). Fox claims that a total of 143 ICA members (125 men and eighteen women) took part in the civil war on the republican side (Fox, *Story*, pp.233-41).
54. UCDA, Humphreys Papers, A.A. C/S to Adjutant General IRA, 22 July 1922, P106/1954 (2).
55. UCDA, Cowan Family Papers, ICA South County Dublin Unit, Memorandum on Active and General service (civil war), P34/D/45.
56. UCDA, Desmond FitzGerald Papers, Department of Justice (D/J) report, 7 May 1929, P80/906 (2).
57. Ibid, D/J report, July 1929, P80/907 (2). Molony had been an ICA member in 1916.
58. Ibid, D/J report, 19 June 1929, P80/851 (20). See also Brian Hanley, *The IRA, 1926-36* (Dublin, 2002), pp.53-6.
59. McCormack was O/C, McGowan, quartermaster, and Purcell, secretary, of the army council (*ICA Army Council Bulletin*, 18 November 1934). Various copies of the duplicated *Bulletin* are to be found in the NLI and the Cathal O'Shannon Papers in the ILHMA.
60. UCDA, Cowan Family Papers, O'Donoghue to Purcell, 14 June 1934, P34/D/43.
61. *ICA Bulletin* 18 November 1934; Byrne, *Congress Revisited*, p.15.
62. *ICA Bulletin*, 18 November 1934.

63. UCDA, Humphreys Papers, Mick Price to Sighle Humphreys, 13 July 1934, P106/1489. The four were Price, Peadar O'Donnell, George Gilmore and Nora Connolly O'Brien.
64. *Republican Congress*, 8 December 1934.
65. National Archives (NA), ICA GHQ to all units, 24 August 1934, Jus8/320. See *Irish Workers Voice*, 6 & 13 October 1934 for speeches from the ICA delegates.
66. NA, Roddy Connolly to ICA ranks, 20 November 1934, Jus8/320
67. *ICA Bulletin*, 18 November 1934.
68. NA, ICA Convention Notes, 13 January 1935, Jus8/322. Membership figures were Dublin: 105, Belfast: fifty-nine, Cork: forty, Westmeath: twenty-five, Kildare: seven, Carlow: six, Limerick: twenty-five, Ballymore Eustace: ten, Kilkenny: seven, Glasgow: twenty-five.
69. *ICA Bulletin*, 3 January 1935.
70. Ibid, 23 January 1935.
71. NA, ICA Constitution (n.d.), Jus8/320.
72. *ICA Bulletin*, 23 January 1935.
73. Ibid, 15 March 1935. It was probably this statement that led to the arrest of Price and other ICA activists during the strike.
74. Ibid, 6 February 1935.
75. Ibid, 26 April and 13 June 1935.
76. Ibid, 5 September 1935.
77. Ibid, 13 December 1934.
78. Ibid, 20 March 1935.
79. Ibid, 27 November 1934, 13 June 1935.
80. Ibid, 13, 20 February, 15, 27 May, 1935.
81. Ibid, 5 September 1935.
82. NA, ICA Convention Notes, 9 June 1935, Jus8/322.
83. NA, ICA GHQ to Kilkenny unit, 4 April 1935, Jus8/322, *Irish Workers Voice*, 1 December 1934.
84. NA, Garda report, 18 November 1934, Jus8/320.
85. NA, ICA Convention Notes, 9 June 1935, Jus8/322, and A/G ICA to O/C Kilkenny Unit, 4 September and 5 December 1934, Jus8/320.
86. *ICA Bulletin*, 20 March and 22 May 1935.
87. Ibid, 13 June 1935.
88. NA, ICA GHQ to local units, 3 July 1935, Jus8/322.
89. Ibid, GHQ to Kilkenny unit, 21 July 1935, Jus8/322.
90. NA, ICA GHQ to Kilkenny unit, 29 July 1935, Jus8/322 and *ICA Bulletin*, 13 June 1935.
91. Ibid, GHQ to Kilkenny, 1 October 1935, Jus8/322.
92. NLI, Labour Party, *5th Annual Report* (1936), p.65-7.
93. NLI, Labour Party, List of Delegates p.108, *7th Annual Report* (1937).
94. Hanley, *The IRA*, p. 196-7.
95. For veterans' pensions see *Labour News*, 13, 27 February, 13 March 1937; for anti-coronation protest, see 8 May 1937.
96. Ibid, 17 April, 7 August, 27 November 1937, 22 January 1938.
97. See Fearghal McGarry, '“Catholics first and politicians afterwards”: the Labour Party and the workers' republic, 1936-39', *Saothar* 25 (2000), pp.57-65.
98. Such as the short lived 'Irish Republican Workers Guard' in Cork during 1934, or in response to physical attacks on the left in Dublin during 1936 with the formation of a joint CPI/Congress 'defence corps.' See NA, Garda report, 9 February 1934, Jus 8/318 and Hanley, *The IRA*, p. 108.